The Utility of Islamic Imagery in the West

J.A. Progler

بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم

The Utility of Islamic Imagery in the West

:Writer

J.A. Progler

:Published in print

al-Tawhid Islamic Journal

:Digital Publisher

Ghaemiyeh center of computerized researches

Contents

The Utility of Islamic Imagery in the West

BOOK ID

Authors(s): J.A. Progler

Category: Politics amp; Current Affairs

Journal: Vol.۱۴, N.۴

Publisher(s): al-Tawhid Islamic Journal

Topic Tags: Islam in west Orientalism Holywar Muslim Terror

point

Language

English

A discussion of the negative imagery of Islam in the West. The Orient and Orientalism. Medieval Phantasms of Sex and Violence . Holy War, and The Utility of "Muslim .Terror" in Israeli-American Relations

The Utility of Islamic Imagery in the West

point

J.A. Progler

Asst. Professor of Social Studies at CUNY, Brooklyn College

The long history of encounters between Western civilization and Islam has produced a tradition of portraying, in largely negative and self-serving ways, the Islamic religion and Muslim cultures. There is a lot of literature cataloguing (and sometimes correcting) these stereotypes. It is not my intention to rehash this corpus here, .though I do rely upon some of the more important works

What I want to do instead is focus on a particular dimension of these encounters, and

examine why the West has consistently constructed and perpetuated negative images of Islam and Muslims. My focus will be on the utility of Islamic imagery in .Western civilization

Most people seem to be familiar with stereotypes and negative imagery of Arabs and Muslims-indeed, some are so firmly entrenched that the consumers of these images are unable to distinguish them from reality. At the same time, many people have an idea how these images come about (books, television, speeches). But by looking at the cultural history of Islamic-Western encounters from the perspective of utility, I am able to locate the

.correlations between imagery and political economy

Western image-makers, including religious authorities, political establishments, and corporate-media conglomerates, conceptualize for their consumers' images of Muslims and/or Arabs in sometimes amusing and other tunes cruel or tragic ways. Upon closer examination, these images seem to serve essential purposes throughout .the history of Western civilization

At times these purposes are benign, at others quite sinister. Often, there are tragic consequences for Muslims resulting from the socio-political climate fostered by images. Focusing on the dimension of utility can help to reveal some ties between .imagery and action

At the same time, I am aware that focusing solely on imagery misses the important dimensions of intention and power. Though I reserve a careful look at these dimensions for another study, I do recognize the need to consider here some of those people who have the power to provide public conceptualizations of Muslims, such as religious figures, academics, policy pundits, journalists, and entertainment .conglomerates

Drawing upon the historical and cultural catalogue of assumptions and perceptions about Islam, these experts and spokespeople pick and choose the appropriate images to serve their purposes. Many times, they are seemingly unaware of using an image, which is indicative of how deeply entrenched they have become. The stories of those with the power to present need to be told, but they are beyond the scope of this .article

Similarly, fruitful research may also reveal the degree to which Muslims contribute to their own images. That, too, I will reserve for another study. The

purpose here, then, is to suggest some of the broader utilitarian dimensions of Islamic .imagery in the West

A recurring theme in the present study is the idea of packaging the complexities of Islam and Muslim cultures into easily comprehensible categories–good and bad, beautiful and dangerous, desirable and repulsive–and I look at these in terms of their .utility in Western cultural history and political economy

Academic culture is an important site to reveal the utility of imagery, since these are the studies that inform policy makers and politicians; this is also where Western ideas are introduced into native cultures. But it is also necessary to focus on popular culture, especially news and entertainment, because this is where many people in the West .get their impressions of Islam and Muslims

The 'Other' in Western Colonial Discourse

Images of the Other are prevalent in Western civilization, and have become firmly ensconced in the discourse of colonization and conquest, whoever the victims may be. Some images are rooted in Greek notions of barbarians, others born of the Middle Ages. They have been carried through the Reconquista and Inquisition, picked up during the age of colonial expansion, developed by Orientalists in the ١٩th and early ٢٠th century, and continue on into the age of mass media and globalized political .economy. But images don't exist in a vacuum. They have uses

For example, in their invasion and colonization of the Americas Europeans brought with them–in addition to muskets and cannons–a great deal of cultural baggage, including rigid and preconceived notions of

the Other. These images, intertwined with religious and political conflicts, all found .their way into the new world, and eventually entangled Native people

In fact, historians have shown that American legal traditions regarding Native peoples are based on legal traditions of the Holy Roman Empire which were born of the Crusades against Muslims(١). For that reason, it will be instructive to spend some time looking at images of Native Americans in the West

The American scholar Berkhofer carefully analyzes the rationale for images of the "Indian" Particularly striking is his observation that there is a dual image, of "good" or "noble" Indians and "bad" or "ignoble" Indians, and how this developed from pre-conception to image to fact He nicely summarizes the elements of the image:(٢)

Generalizing from one tribe's society and culture to all Indians .١

Conceiving of Indians in terms of their deficiencies according to White ideals rather .٢ than in terms of their own various cultures

Using moral evaluation as description of Indians .٣

Berkhofer suggests that "since Whites primarily understood the Indian as an antithesis to themselves, then civilization and Indianness as they defined them would forever be opposites".(٣)

He believes that while some researchers have uncovered one or another element of the Indian image, most have failed to put it all together. Images of Indians are usually treated by scholars in two ways, some have studied "what changed, what persisted, and why," while others studied "what images were held by whom, when, where, and why '.(۴)

Some scholars see them "as

The best comprehensive discussion on the lineage of Western legal thought from - ١

the Crusades through modern legal treatment of Native Americans is Robert A. Williams, The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest .((New York: Oxford University Press, ۱۹۹۰

۲- Robert F. Berkhofer, The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from .(Columbus to the Present (New York: Vintage, ۱۹۷۹

۳- Ibid., ۲۹.

۴- Ibid., ۳۰.

a reflection of White cultures and as the primary explanation of White behaviour vis-a-vis Native Americans", while others see them "to be dependent upon the political and economic relationships prevailing in White societies at various times".(١)

While each approach is useful in its own way, I agree with Berkhofer's suggestion that any comprehensive understanding of Western images has to consider both aspects, asking not only what the images were and how they continue, but also who holds them and why. He combines the two approaches into a useful and broadly applicable methodology for analyzing images and their utility. Berkhofer's methodology helps us to ask questions like who benefits from these images, and how are they manipulated and perpetuated? I want to look at European images of Muslims in this framework, and consider in particular the way images change to suit particular historical circumstances

Framing the Ubiquitous Orient

A growing body of critical literature examines the formation, utilization and perpetuation of images in the context of European conceptualization and colonization of the Muslim (٢).Critics generally agree that Orientalist pursuits of knowledge are inextricably tied to colonial and imperial power, and that the West's self-image has been cultivated in a binary relationship with Islamic culture.

The literature in this area is quite detailed, and there is no need to repeat all of it here. What I want to do is first look briefly at some of the factors in the development and maintenance of this binary vision from the Crusades through the modern period, and then apply the

---

١- Ibid., ٣٠-٣١.

٢ - For example: Norman Daniel, Islam and the West: The Making of an Image (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, ١٩٦١); Hichem Djait, Europe and Islam (Berkeley: University of California Press, ١٩٨٥); Thierry Hentsch, Imagining the Middle East (Montreal: Black Rose, ١٩٩٢); Edward Said,Orientalism, (New York:

.(Vintage, ١٩٧٩

same method to more recent examples

According to Norman Daniel, “luxury” and “bellicosity” formed a dual image of Islam in Medieval Western Europe. This nexus is intertwined with a second ignorance and malice. In considering how the dual image of Islam persists, Daniel suggests that in .some cases the reason is ignorance and in others it is malice

Ignorance and malice can work together, as in, for example, when a malicious campaign directed by state power toward a scapegoat is explained by using images that rely on the general ignorance of the state's subjects and constituents. This is an important factor in the maintenance of imagery, especially in democratic societies, .and I will return to it later

Edward Said was one of the first to make explicit connections between Western colonization and images of the Muslim world. Said shows how the discourse of Orientalism gave itself legitimacy, revealing that what Orientalists were really talking .about was creating the levers of power

Said's general premise is that knowledge is inextricably tied to power, and that pure scholarship does not exist. Drawing upon textual criticism from selected British and French Orientalists of the ۱۹th and ۲۰th centuries, he summarizes the “principle .dogmas” of Orientalism

One is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, and inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a “classical” Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence

.drawn from modern Oriental realities

A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable, and even scientifically "objective". A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible) ((١)

After noting that these dogmas "persist without significant challenge in the academic and governmental study of the modern Near Orient," Said argues that "the Orient" is itself a constituted entity, and that the notion that there are "geographical spaces with indigenous, radically different inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly (debatable idea." (٢)

While there are numerous institutions in the West engaging in the study of the Orient, there are few if any in the Orient, and those are invariably run by Westerners (for example, the American Universities of Beirut and Cairo, or the Robert College in .Turkey), and consequently, little if any study of the West is done by Orientals

Building upon the foundation of classical Orientalism, a new breed of Orientalist emerged out of Cold War concerns. Characterized by a fusion of classic Orientalism with post-World War II social science, the new discourse was put at the service of foreign

---

.(Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage, ١٩٧٩ -١

.Ibid., ٣٠١ and ٣٢٢ -٢

.policy makers who emphasized prediction and control

۴ However, with all the new techniques, as Said shows, most have not escaped the dogmas of what we might call the orthodox discourse. Neo-Orientalists replace philology with a more anomalous expertise, which, like philology, is still based on .language skills, but is more oriented toward strategic and business interests

This new Orientalism is practiced with an almost mystical authority by experts and Area Studies specialists who have mastered the necessary languages. The usual rationale for continuing Orientalism is that "we" can get to know another people, their way of life, thought, etc. To this end, the new Orientals (many trained at the feet of the orthodox masters) are sometimes allowed to speak for themselves, but only to a limited degree. The Oriental becomes useful as a direct source of information, but the .Orientalist still remains the source of all knowledge

As a way to avoid reconfiguring Orientalist discourse in new contexts, and to diffuse pre-existing truths, Said recommends some questions to keep in mind when approaching the Other: (۱)

۱. How does one represent other cultures?

۲. What is another culture?

۳. Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the "other")?

۴ . Do cultural, religious, and racial differences matter more than socio-economic categories, or politico-historical ones?

۵. How do ideas acquire authority, "normality," and even the status

---

۱- Ibid., ۳۲۵-۳۲۶.

?of “natural” truth

?What is the role of the intellectual .۶

?Is he there to validate the culture and state of which he is a part .۷

What importance must he give to an independent critical consciousness, an . ۸ ?oppositional critical consciousness

Said concludes with a warning to guard against accepting handed down notions of the other, and incorporating them into one's work without first subjecting them to critical .analysis

Thierry Hentsch incorporates earlier studies of Orientalism.(۱) He believes that Western images of the Muslim world are projections of Western insecurities about Self onto the Other, and that as long as the Other is a mirror for the Self, there will always be conflict. I think this is becoming evident in the recent usage of images of Muslims and -Islam, built upon not only centuries of images but in particular upon very carefully constructed images of Arabs from the ۱۹۶۰s and ۱۹۷۰s. I will return to .this in due time

To Hentsch, Western images of a sensual yet violent Orient are self-telling myths. Like Bernal, (۲)Hentsch believes that racist myths of Western supremacy were fabricated in the ۱۷th and ۱۸th centuries and projected backward to explain contemporary realities. As Said pointed out, collating these myths became the job of the Orientalists. But Hentsch's sweep is far wider and more inclusive than Said. He considers pre-Orientalist cultural factors, and brings his treatment right up to the ۱۹۹۰-۹۱ Persian Gulf Oil War. Hentsch believes that the West's myth of the Orient will continue to serve its

---

.(Thierry Hentsch, Imagining the Middle East (Montreal: Black Rose, ۱۹۹۲ -۱

Martin Bernal, Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (New - ۲

.(Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, ١٩٨٧

.explanatory functions right on into the next century

Hentsch's essential hypothesis is that the area we call the Middle East (which he defines as the nations from Morocco to Iran; Said's Orient) has been a self-reflecting mirror for Western civilization, in which the West defines itself by constructing an Other who is everything the West is not. Hentsch's thesis is that the “Orient” is an immense repository of our own imagined world” and that “we reveal ourselves (through our way of seeing.” (١

His “capital supposition” is that “any study of the Other is futile unless we first observe ourselves face to face with it, and in particular, unless we attempt to understand how, and why, we have studied and represented this self-same Other down to the present (day.”(٢

Speaking on ethnocentrism, Hentsch asserts that it “is not a flaw to be simply set aside, nor is it a sin to be expunged through repentance. It is the precondition of our vision of the Other. Far from offering us absolution, this precondition compels us constantly to return to our point of departure, if only to grasp the internal and external imperatives which shape our curiosity about the Other.” (٣) I want to continue with Hentsch's analysis, and look in particular at the genesis and continuation of .images as they relate to the emerging European colonizing enterprise

Races Debased and Unities Sundered

In November of ١٠٩٥, Pope Urban II initiated the first European attempt at colonizing the Muslim world-known in the West as the Crusades-by drawing this

---

.Hentsch, op. cit., ix -١

.Ibid., x -٢

.Ibid., xiv, emphasis in the original -٣

:fateful picture

For you must hasten to carry aid to your brethren dwelling in the East, who need your help, which they have often asked. For the Turks, a Persian people, have attacked them. I exhort you with earnest prayer- not I, but God-that, as heralds of Christ, you urge men by frequent exhortation, men of all ranks, knights as well as foot soldiers, rich as well as poor, to hasten to exterminate this vile race from the lands of your .brethren. Christ commands it

And if those who set out thither should lose their lives on the way by land, or in crossing the sea, or in fighting the pagans, their sins shall be remitted. Oh what a disgrace, if a race so despised, base, and the instrument of demons, should so overcome a people endowed with faith in the all-powerful God, and resplendent with .the name of Christ

Let those who have been accustomed to make private war against the faithful carry on to a successful issue a war against the infidels. Let those who for a long time have been robbers now become soldiers of Christ. Let those who fought against brothers and relatives now fight against these barbarians let them zealously undertake the (journey under the guidance of the Lord. (۱

The Pope's words lay out many of the themes that would characterize this mass colonial movement East for the next two centuries. In one reading of the Crusading venture, restless knights and small-time princes are enticed by their

p: ۱۱

The passage appears in August C. Krey, The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye - ۱ .(Witnesses and Participants(Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, ۱۹۵۸

lords with tales of land and wealth, in the hopes of turning their swords away from the increasingly nervous feudal establishment, or what the Pope calls the faithful .brethren

Landless folks and the poor-euphemized by the Pope as criminals-can also be turned Eastward with enticements of land and Divine forgiveness.. But what is most interesting here is that the Pope conceptualizes his Oriental Other in racial terms The enemy, for now, is the debased races of Turks and Persians, and Islam is not yet a .part of the Western conceptual matrix

There is also an overlap here with Christian treatment of Jews as the "instruments of demons", one of the key tenets of anti-Semitic white supremacy. In Christian Europe, Jews and Muslims suffered the wrath of an increasingly rabid and intolerant resurgent Christianity, culminating in the expulsion of both from Muslim Spain in the ١٥th century, at the dawn of the expansionist age while this is not the place to trace this legacy in detail, this is also the period in which the religion of rationalism replaced Christianity, with the images of the other traveling full circle from Pope Urban's ١١th century "debased races" to the Age of Enlightenment, with its biological explanation .for colonization and genocide

As Hentsch shows, (١) the uses of Islam continued to change according to European internal and external political and economic situations. In the ١٦th century, when Ottoman Empire was consolidating its control over Mediterranean trade routes, the resulting "rift" was projected back to the first

---

١- Ibid.

centuries of Islam, making a contemporary economic problem seem to be the result .of “age-old” conflict

Any rift in the Mediterranean was there long before Muslims came on the scene. There was never any trans-Mediterranean unity. The Catholic Church, which inherited .the decaying Roman Empire, soon split into its Eastern and Western branches

Conventional history, such as is found in World Civilization textbooks, overlooks this and continues to frame Muslims for sundering the imaginary unity of European civilization. Religious imagery had its uses as well. Christian disunity, which began long before Muslims came on the scene, was blamed on Muslim hordes that exploded from Arabia, forever sundering the unity of the Church

When the Ottomans were at the peak of their power in the ۱۷th century, European princes viewed them as a respected and powerful rival. However, with the waning of .Ottoman power, the Muslim world was seen as a place of exotic trials and espionage

This newly exoticized Orient began to be loved for its objects, while its people were despised or belittled. By the ۱۹th century, race-based explanations for colonization had fully re-emerged. As Hentsch suggests, (۱) some Muslims were considered by Europeans to be civilized according to their criteria, but this was explained by the .presence of Aryan blood in some Muslim races

In fact, as French travelers saw it, the problem with Persians was that, despite their pure Aryan roots, their blood was tainted because of mixing with lesser, darker ,skinned breeds. Before continuing this trend into the modern period

---

Ibid., and cf. Marshall Hodgson, Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam -۱ .(and World History (New York: Cambridge University Press, ۱۹۹۳

I want to go back over this terrain and look at Christian and European obsessions and insecurities with sex and violence, and the ways they provided particularly fertile .ground for images of Muslims

Medieval Phantasms of Sex and Violence

And, if you desire to know what was done about the enemy whom we found there, know that in the portico of Solomon and his Temple, our men rode in the blood of the Saracens up to the knees of the horses (Daimbert, Official Summary of the ۱st (Crusade) (۱

Those amongst the Saracens are considered most religious who can make the most women pregnant they lie with their concubines and wives often in times of fast, because they suppose making love and desire are so meritorious, either to satisfy lust or to generate many sons to strengthen the defense of their religion. (Bishop Jacques (de Vitry on the ۵th Crusade) (۲

Count Roland gripped his sword dripping with gore he strikes his valiant blows, shivering shafts of spears and bucklers, too, cleaving through feet and fists, saddles and sides. To see him hack the limbs from Saracens, pile them upon the earth, corpse upon corpse, would call to mind a very valiant knight. (Verse from the Song of Roland, (۱۲th century minstrelsy) (۳

Nor did Mahomet teach anything of great austerity. . . indeed, he even allowed many pleasurable things, to do with a multitude of women, abuse of them, and suchlike. . . many Christians change and will change to the Saracen religion. (Dominican Friar ,Humbert of Lyons

---

۱- In Krey, op. cit., ۲۷۵.

۲- In Norman Daniel, Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de .(Geste (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, ۱۹۸۴

۳- In D.D.R. Owen, ed., The Song of Roland: The Oxford Text (London: Allen Unwin,

.۱۹۷۲), ۷۵

(C. ۱۳۰۰) (۱)

These quotes are instructive in their presentation of Western Christian foundational attitudes toward Islam. In Medieval Europe, the Popes began to use Islam as a proxy to convince backsliding Christians to return to the fold and to convince themselves that Christians were chaste, denouncing Islam as a sexually liberal and even .licentious religion

Once the Europeans gained a foothold in West Asia, one of the areas of greatest concern was miscegenation. In the Crusader mind, even sex with one's own wife was a carnal sin; sex with an infidel woman was punished by "castration for the Crusader and facial mutilation for the woman." Muslim women were "viewed as defiled and wanton whores and seductresses." To Christians, Muslim ease with sexuality was (seen as "offensively non-ascetic behavior." (۲)

In fact, it seems that Medieval Christians could do nothing but condemn the Muslim appreciation of sexuality, and therefore they attacked "Islam" as a religion that had been directly set up to encourage promiscuity and lust. . . Biographies of Mohammed by Christians describe the Prophet's sex life in a manner that reveals far more about .their own sexual problems than about the facts of the Prophet's life

The Koran was said, quite incorrectly, to condone homosexuality and to encourage unnatural forms of intercourse. One scholar claimed that the foulness of lust among Muslims was inexpressible; they were deep in this filth from the soles of their feet to .the crown of the head

Soon the Church would accuse any out-group in

۱- In Daniel, ۱۹۸۴, op. cit., ۷۰

۲- These quotes are from David E. Stannard, American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World (New York: Oxford University Press, ۱۹۹۲), ۱۷۹. Stannard provides a particularly useful overview of the relationship between sex and violence in Western

".colonial discourse, especially in the section on "Sex, Race, and Holy War

Christendom of excessive and unnatural sexual practices and twelfth century Christians stigmatized "heresy" of Islam by cursing what they considered its sexual laxity. (۱)

To really grasp the utility of this imagery, we need to look at sexuality in European history. In his discussion of human sexuality, Foucault describes Arab-Muslim societies as among those "which have endowed themselves with an ars erotica" in which "truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience." (۲)

Western civilization, on the other hand, possesses a scientia sexualis, the "procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret." In the West, the confession is "one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" and "Western man has become a confessing animal." (۳) What needs confessing is the sin of enjoyment.

European discomfort with sexuality in Medieval times gradually gives way to a new outlook, still rooted, as Foucault stresses, in the old insecurities, but now at least with an outward expression of enjoyment. By the twentieth century, the alterity of sexuality has now been reversed, suggests Karen Armstrong, with the post-Christian West seeing itself as sexually liberated vis-à-vis a sexually repressed Islam:

At a time when many people in the West are liberating themselves from the sexual repressions of their Christian past, Islam is constantly denigrated as a sexually repressive religion.

We have completely reversed the old stereotype and

---

۱ - Karen Armstrong, Holy War: The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World (NewYork: Anchor, ۱۹۹۲), ۲۳۰.

۲ - Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (New York: Vintage, ۱۹۹۰).

۳ - Ibid., ۵۸-۵۹.

not many people seem interested in the truth of the matter or wish to find out about Islam itself. They simply want to bolster their own needs against their long (established counter-image: Islam (١

Sex and violence continue to be juxtaposed in disturbing ways in American culture. For example, American pilots watched porno movies while preparing to carpet bomb Baghdad in the ١٩٩١ Persian Gulf Oil war, and they scribbled sexually explicit graffiti on the bombs, labeling them as "Mrs. Saddam's sex toy" or "a suppository for Saddam." ((٢

George Bush purposefully mispronounced "Saddam" (which in Arabic has a heavy accent on the last syllable) so that it sounded more like Sodom, evoking the Biblical .city of wanton sexual depravity, and thus sodomy

A wartime propaganda book produced by an American public relations firm hired by the Kuwaitis was entitled The Rape of Kuwait, adding another facet to the highly sexualized justification for what amounts to a firebomb lynch-party of Iraqis reminiscent of the same charge leveled at African Americans to justify racist brutality. I'll come back to some of these themes in a moment, but I first want to consider .further some unique elements of the American conceptualization of the Muslim other

Orientalizing the American Way

Most of the literature on Orientalist pursuits focuses on European forms of Orientalism. Comparatively little has been written about the peculiarities of American Orientalism. The latter is worth careful attention, since the United States seems obsessed with becoming the leader in a unipolar world, and some official policy circles

---

.Ibid., ٢٣٠ -١

In Stannard, op. cit., ٢٥٣, cf. Douglas Kellner, The Persian Gulf TV War (Boulder, -٢ .(Colorado: Westview Press, ١٩٩٢

.list Islam as a “new” but qualified threat to that supposed inevitability

١٧th through ١٩th century American writings illustrates how Europeans who invaded North America believed that they were God's chosen people, that the land they were colonizing was the promised land, and that Native people's were God-less heathen (who were to be driven from their homes and burned.(١

Sha'ban points out that religiously driven settlers, Puritans in particular, imagined parallels between themselves and the wandering tribes of Israel. These early roots were bolstered by an emerging and increasingly strong, literal, and exclusive sense of a relationship with their God, who had ordained pre-United States settlers to be “a light in the West” that would shine over the rest of the world. This expansionary, violent, and millennial sense of a divine mission became known as “manifest destiny.” ((٢

In practice, manifest destiny initially meant bringing the “light” of American style Protestant Christianity to the rest of the world. Americans saw themselves as being placed in the “center of the world” by Providence in order to carry out a Divine :mission, as a writer in the American Theological Review put it in ١٨٥٩

Indeed, radii drawn from our eastern, western, and southern shores, reach almost all Pagan, Mohammedan, and Papal lands, or rather most of them can be reached by (nearly direct water communication. (٣

The American missionary enterprise-the vanguard of manifest destiny- required information on “barbarians,” “heathens,” “savages,” and “pagans,” and especially ,“Mohammedans,” “Turks,” and “Saracens.” Beginning in the early ١٩th century

---

This story, including a case study of Puritan violence toward Indians, is well told by -١ Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of .(Conquest (New York: Norton, ١٩٧۶

Fuad Sha'ban, Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of - ٢

.Orientalism in America (Durham, North Carolina: The Acorn Press, ۱۹۹۱), ۲۳-۲۶

.In Ibid., ۲۰ -۳

particularly when manifest destiny turned cast as well as west, American writers took .a strong interest in Islam and the Prophet

In various treatises, they dwell on the Prophet (upon whom be peace) as an impostor and portray Islam as a deviant Christian heresy. Some of the very few instances where this does not apply tend to romanticize the Prophet as a hero, but these views .also had at bottom the intention to defeat Islam and convert Muslims to Christianity

An equally important goal of ١٩th century religious writings on Islam, as Sha'ban notes, was to describe the alleged depravity of Islam in order to assert the imagined .purity of Christianity, a tendency inherited from Medieval European Christianity

Commercial, diplomatic, and military contacts with Mediterranean Muslim lands, coupled with evangelical revivalism in the late ١٨th and early ١٩th century, led to a "shift of the American myth of God's Israel from the New World to the Holy Land." (١)

But the imaginary world of Biblical Zion constructed in the parlors and parishes of the United States soon had to be reconciled with the realities on the ground in Palestine. Unfortunately, this reconciliation did not entail rethinking the vision of Zion-it meant imposing that vision on Muslims and non-Protestant Christians who happened to be in .the way of the American sense of Providence

Americans were also motivated in their dealings with Islam and Muslims by a complex amalgam of Oriental fairy tales. Making use of a body of literature largely ignored by

---

١- Ibid., ١۴٩.

other critics of Orientalism, Sha'ban takes a particular interest in Orientalism as found in popular American literature. He notes that one of the most often printed books in the ١٩th century United States was a translation of the Arabian Nights.

That collection of fables and fairy tales, often translated in the West subject to the sexual whims of the translator and marketed to titillate readers, was taken as an accurate portrayal of a timeless, exotic, and mystical East. Tales of harems, genies, and magic carpets found their way into most American homes and libraries. These stories often provided the criteria by which secular travelers to the East would judge their own experiences.

Sha'ban's detailed analysis of travel literature reveals that, time after time, American men traveling to the East were both aroused and repulsed by Muslim culture. One American traveler to Istanbul in ١٨٥٨ was so mystified and aroused by a veiled Muslim woman that he offered $٥٠ to buy her, but soon realized it was not possible since he "was no Mohammedan." (١)

While often envying the Turks for their "harems," some travelers also looked for signs of distress so that they might heroically rescue "oppressed" women from the clutches of the Turkish "barbarians." These expectations were founded upon what Sha'ban calls the "dream of Baghdad", and he aptly demonstrates that such dreams abound in early American Orientalism.

This dream of Oriental splendour was picked up by Hollywood in its early years, with Rudolph Valentino epitomizing the Romantic lover

---

١- Ibid., ١٨٣.

in Arab garb. Similar Oriental fantasies permeated American entertainment all through the ۲۰th century, ranging from cartoons like “Popeye meets Ali Baba and the ۴۰ Thieves,” to “The Adventures of Sindbad” and “Lawrence of Arabia,” and right on up '.to the ۱۹۸۹ Disney Orientalist extravaganza “Aladdin

Corporate American Phantasms

The dual image of luxury and bellicosity, as suggested by Daniel above, can be illustrated through looking at the incredible popularity of the Arabian Nights-type themes in American corporate culture. Though its use as literature has declined somewhat in recent times, the Arabian Nights, as noted above, was once among the .most popular books in America

Hollywood has capitalized on this American obsession with things Oriental in its recent production of “Aladdin,” a phantasmagoria of Orientalist cliché, complete with a .menagerie of harems, genies, magic carpets, and, of course, murderous barbarians

A promotional documentary about the making of Aladdin boasts of authenticity in its producers' emulation of “Islamic design” and “Persian architecture,” showing scenes of animators carefully drawing images of mosques and calligraphy from photographs; .they appear to use great care in detailing their drawings to the minutest degree

But one thing is missing from all this careful attention to detail-people. Characters in Hollywood's Aladdin are compound stereotypes, grossly racist caricatures of the worst Western phantasms-villainous sorcerers in turbans, sensuous harems, sumptuous feasts, hordes of fat ugly thugs with swords (ready to chop off hands for stealing bread), flying carpets, genies. All this is an alterity of the hero, Aladdin, who speaks and acts

(as if straight out of an American suburban high school. (١)

Sometimes, American media wizards ram together luxurious and bellicose images to create the classic American phantasm. A recent example is the ١٩٩٥ American football Super Bowl half-time antics, an extended commercial-like foray.

First, crooner Tony Bennett sings "Desert Caravan" against a backdrop resembling a mosque. Then Indiana Jones (who shot up many a Muslim barbarian in his Hollywood films) swings into the scene and rescues the football-shaped Super Bowl trophy from hordes of turbaned Muslims with swords (or were they Arabs? or Turks? Moors?). Jones makes short work of these generic barbarians, retrieving the trophy, along with a blonde heroine for good measure.

This is followed by a song and dance routine, featuring gyrating women wearing costumes right out of the ١٩٦٠s American Orientalist situation comedy "I Dream of Jeannie." Other women are draped in black or white chadors; some of these women doff their veils and swing them along with their hips, as if reveling in their new found "liberation."

Of course, it is the American hero Jones who has rescued them from their oppressive Muslim masters. The show climaxes with a flashy display of fireworks, and the fans erupt into a jingoistic frenzy, the likes of which rivals similar outbursts when the national anthem is played. Clearly, such Oriental fantasies are part of America's national heritage, which can be utilized by production designers for all sorts of entertainment and commercial purposes.

Commercial television and its corporate advertising conglomerates

---

١- Henry Giroux provides a useful analysis of Aladdin and other Disney films as they relate to child development in America, in his essay "Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?" which can be found in the collection of essays edited by Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kinchloe, Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood (Boulder,

.Colorado: Westview Press, ۱۹۹۷), ۵۳-۶۷

from time to time intensify their utilization of Islamic exotica in Popular American culture. Interestingly, this often takes place side by side with an increase in the .vilification of Muslims and Islam

American corporate news is full of talk about "Islamic terror," "Muslim suicide bombers," "the warriors of Allah," "the holy war of Islam," or "Iranian backed radical ".extremist Moslem fundamentalist terrorists

Examples abound, including a notorious programme in the Fall of ۱۹۹۴ called "Jihad in America," which described a centrally controlled, top-down international Islamic conspiracy to carry out terror in the US, or the more recent rush to blame the ۱۹۹۵ .Oklahoma City bombing on Muslims

These public displays of jingoistic fury have real repercussions on the ground, with a series of mosque- burnings and increased hate and bias crimes against Muslims, including the tragic case of a new mosque in Yuba City, California, burned to the ground by arsonists on the eve of its opening to the community in September ۱۹۹۴. .Imagery creates a climate within which such acts seem to make sense

Images of Muslims seem to ebb and flow with the American political tides, and close examination reveals some connections. Following the violent orgy of death and mayhem popularly known to Americans as "Desert Storm," American corporate .television began to feature advertisements with an Arabian Nights motif

For example, a commercial aired on corporate TV throughout ۱۹۹۱ and ۱۹۹۲ for "Near East Rice Pilaf" features scenes in a Middle Eastern bazaar. The ad segues to an

American family preparing to gorge themselves on an exotic dish, as if eating Near East Rice Pilaf will somehow transport the consumer into an Eastern fantasy world. IBM computers, as part of its globalized campaign of superficial multicultural inclusion, produced a similar commercial, which utilizes Arabic dialogue and racist .caricatures

In an exotic bazaar setting, two natives thoughtfully extol the virtues of the latest American techno-excesses. A similar commercial was produced by Isuzu automobiles, taking place somewhere in North Africa, also with Arabic (as well as French) speaking natives. It begins with a call from a minaret, a pseudo adhan (which has always been an aural symbol for Islam in American film and TV), and ends with the natives being dazzled by expensive leather seats and the corporation's newest .mobile contraption

These and other commercials share the common theme of a utilizing a timeless fantasy world that is backwards yet ready for the salvation of American consumer culture. Not intended to sell computers and cars to anyone but Americans, these utilizations of Orientalist imagery serve to make powerful connections for consumers, .especially between tradition and progress

With increasing numbers of American corporations hopping on the Oriental bandwagon, American Muslims have tried to form collective responses. According to a series of press releases beginning in November ۱۹۹۴, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has mounted several campaigns against greeting card corporations for cards that objectify veiled Muslim women in degrading ways, or which feature nude women juxtaposed with verses from the

.Qur'an

There have been beer commercials featuring actresses with verses of the Qur'an emblazoned across their chests, and the fashion industry has suddenly discovered the beauty of Islamic calligraphy, using it in clothing designs modeled by voluptuous women in public pageants. CAIR has also worked on a number of bias incidents, many involving women barred from working because they choose to wear the Islamic .modest dress

It seems that in American corporate culture, veils and other Oriental exotica are widely utilized to titillate buyers, but that real women who wear the Muslim modest dress are despised and rejected. Another phenomenon has also emerged since the .Persian Gulf Oil War

There is an increasing number of corporate news media programmes about Muslims living in the US Some no doubt grew out of wartime public relations on behalf of "good Muslims," like the Kuwaiti royals, who hired one of the biggest US public relations firms to manage their wartime propaganda.(۱) Most juxtapose two images there is a "terrorist fringe" among US Muslims (the "bad Muslims"), but most other Muslims are peace-loving and eager to be assimilated to the American way of life (the "good .("Muslims

The American corporate news pundits continually remind consumers that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the US; at the same time, they tell Americans that "Islamic terror cells" are on the rise in the US Muslims in such stories are usually defined by .their politics and class

While the media assure Americans that most Muslims are dutiful middle-class

---

.Kellner, op. cit., ۶۸-۷۰ -۱

citizens, the "terrorist fringe" is always laying at the wait, a threat to the very core of American interests and values Such images have been utilized by politicians and corporate leaders to frighten American citizen-consumers into accepting all sorts of .barbarous immigration and security laws

Closer scrutiny reveals that, in most cases, the Muslims profiled on corporate TV programmes are Palestinians. One insidious implication is that Palestinians are .somehow inherently irrational, though this is not always made explicit

The misogynist character of dominant media imagery of Muslims in the US is underlined, for example, when the corporate news shows images of Palestinian or other Muslim men crying, perhaps after another Israeli raid on their homes. Since "real men" don't cry, it becomes hard for Americans to imagine other people's grief .expressed in that way, and it is seen instead as an expression of rage or insanity

The point is that some images are heightened by the inability of television to portray anything but the most extreme expressions of emotion, causing some to label TV as (best suited to portray death.(۱

This technical inadequacy is something that even good PR can't fix It also heightens the effectiveness of television as a medium to utilize deep-seated American visions of sex and violence in Islam

US corporate news features often use Islamic religious symbols to frame stories about violent political events. For example, a ۱۹۹۴ story about the end of the disastrous American intervention in Somalia begins with the reporter intoning ominously "night falls

---

۱- For an explication of this thesis, see Joyce Nelson, The Perfect Machine: TV in the . (Nuclear Age (Toronto: Between the Lines, ۱۹۸۷

in Mogadishu" over the Islamic call to prayer and a backdrop of a mosque silhouetted .by a dark, cloudy sky

The report segues to picture bites of destroyed American helicopters and corpses of US marines. The call to prayer in this case, as in many others, forebodes death and .terror. Furthermore, this is the only Somali voice in the piece

Some media portrayals of Muslims are reminiscent of the contrived sense of inevitability that Native American scholar Ward Churchill brings out in his comments :about the Orientalist extravaganza epic film, Lawrence of Arabia

Its major impact was to put a 'tragic' but far more humane face upon the nature of Britain's imperial pretensions in the region, making colonization of the Arabs seem more acceptable-or at least more inevitable-than might have otherwise been the (case. (١)

The US media often rely on pre-existing images of Muslim barbarity in order to explain the need for intervention or to help the US military save face when things don't come out as planned. When the US Marines were escorting members of the UN out of Somalia in February ١٩٩٥, ABC News televised a report of a multiple amputation, featuring a man who presumably had just been convicted of theft in an Islamic law court. The piece was pure emotion and imagery, seeming to say, with Churchill's tragic self- righteousness, "look how easily the natives revert to their barbarity once " we leave

Despite its pervasiveness in the media, imagery that I have described above is far

---

١ - Ward Churchill, Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the .Colonization of American Indians (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, ١٩٩٢), ٢٤٥

removed from the daily experiences of most American citizen- consumers But lately, some media producers have tried to bring these images closer to home

TV Holy War

In the Fall of ۱۹۹۴, PBS aired a documentary by journalist Steve Emerson Titled "Jihad in America," it followed on the heels of other recent works that put forth the thesis of an elaborate, secret, and centralized network of "Islamic terrorists," who take orders from Iran, and who are mounting a violent war against their hated enemy, the mighty (Great Satan. (۱)

Evidence within the programme suggests that Emerson has access to official government intelligence. Most of the programme either consists of interviews staged by Emerson, or clips from Muslim conferences (which are available publicly from the .(organizations that sponsor conferences

However, some clips appear to be from other sources, such as home videos confiscated from Muslims in FBI sweeps during the Oil War and in the wake of the World Trade Center incident, or surreptitiously taped surveillance videos Using "former" FBI and State Department officials as informants is only a smoke screen to .cover the access Emerson has to official intelligence

Concurrent with the debut of his program, Emerson was invited to appear on news and talk shows as an "expert on terrorism " A year or so of this kind of programming set the climate for what became a rush to judge Muslims for crimes they did not commit

Within hours after a truck bomb blew up the Alfred P Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on

---

There is a growing genre of conspiracy literature espousing this thesis in the US, -۱ which has been recently heightened by an Israeli scholar working on a Congressional task force under President Bill Clinton, Yossef Bodansky. See in particular his

book Target America: Terrorism in the U.S. Today (New York: Shapolsky, ١٩٩٣). The same book with identical text is marketed outside the US under the title Target the .West

Wednesday ١٩ April ١٩٩٥, word was out that "Islamic extremists" were responsible. Talking heads on all the major corporate news outlets made immediate parallels to the World Trade Center bombing, or to the car bombing of the American Marine .barracks in Beirut

Programmes sporting logos like "Terror in the Heartland" popped up on all the major networks. Speculations ran wild: an international cartel of terrorists were retaliating for the abduction from Pakistan of their leader, Ramzi Ahmed Yousef; fanatical followers of Shaykh Omar Abdel Rahman were protesting his trial in New York; Muslim extremists intended to show that even America's heartland was not safe from Mideast terror; religious and political "zealots" from the Middle East were lashing out .at the US

That night, Steve Emerson, along with CBS Mideast expert Fuad Ajami, asserted on a CBS news programme that the bombing had "all the earmarks of Islamic radical extremists," and that Muslim terrorists were now "wreaking havoc in the land they ".loathe

Former FBI agent and Pan Am flight ٢٠٣ bombing investigator Oliver "Buck" Revell, who rose to public prominence after appearing in Emerson's anti-Muslim tirade "Jihad in America," was once again wheeled out of obscurity, spewing theories about how .vulnerable the US was to attacks by Islamic militants

It was not only the corporate news media that jumped to such conclusions about Muslims. The same accusations and speculations could be heard from other corners of US officialdom. For example, the director of the House Republican Task Force on Terrorism and

Unconventional Warfare, Yossef Bodansky, well known for his conspiracy theories about a centrally controlled Islamic "holy war" against the West, assured viewers that "we have a host of enemies that have vowed to strike at the heart of the Great Satan" and called upon law enforcement agencies to take preventative measures that amount to severe curtailments of civil liberties. (١)

The tirades by assorted "terrorism experts" continued into Thursday ٢٠ April, when World Trade Center investigator Michael Cherkasky told CNN that "we've got to know what's going on in these fanatical terrorist groups," and called for beefed up intelligence against immigrants.

Politicians worked quickly to capitalize on the tragedy, quickly realizing its utility for pushing new anti-immigration laws and wiretap legislation. Then Republican Senate Majority Leader, and later Presidential candidate, Bob Dole reminded the President that the Senate was ready to pass a new "counter-terrorism" bill, the Omnibus Counter-terrorism Act of ١٩٩٥, which had provisions for enabling the use of "secret evidence" to deport immigrants, allowed for the banning of fundraising by "suspected terrorist" organizations, and lessened or eliminated restrictions for conducting phone taps.

Similarly, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde emphasized that the US had to identify "potentially dangerous foreigners" and that "we should keep them from getting into the country in the first place," while Florida congresswoman Ileana Ros Lehtinen cried that "the radical Islamic movement has penetrated America and presents a real threat to our national security and serenity."

Summing up the general tone of most reporting up to

١- This was reported by Reuters on ٢٠ April ١٩٩٥. All quotes in this paragraph and the next were taken from this report.

this point, James Wooten, an expert on terrorism at the Congressional Research Service, asserted that "it's no longer to be looked at from afar, it's come home to ".roost

As if a vast contingency plan were set in motion, other Federal agencies quickly joined the fray, and there was even talk of possible "retaliation" against. a Middle Eastern state. The Pentagon detailed several Arabic language interpreters to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for possible use in interrogating suspects, and the FBI .began to question Arab and Muslim groups in the Oklahoma City area

A Jordanian-American was detained in London and returned to the US for questioning because his luggage contained "possible bomb making equipment," but which later turned out to be a telephone and other innocuous items. When the man's identity was announced publicly, his property in Oklahoma was vandalized and his wife spat upon. ((١

Though the mainstream media ignored repercussions, the independent Muslim press reported hate crimes related to these incidents. (٢) A Muslim woman in Oklahoma city miscarried her late term child when an angry mob besieged her home with bricks and .stones

Muslims and Arabs were harassed and many organizations received death and bomb threats and phone calls demanding that they get out of the US. All of this abuse was further exacerbated by continuing reports, such as one that the Immigration and Naturalization Service was on the lookout for men of "Middle Eastern appearance" and that they had detained several suspicious men of "Middle Eastern

---

This was reported in a series of news releases by the Associated Press on ٢٠ April -١ .١٩٩٥

.See, for example, Crescent international ١-١٥ May ١٩٩٥ -٢

(origin." (۱

All of this occurred within less than ۴۸ hours after the blast. However, when the composite sketches of "two white males" were released in the late afternoon of ۲۰ April, people began to ask if this reduced the possibility that the bombing was carried ".out by "Middle Eastern terrorists

News services started mentioning a possible "lone kook" or a "disgruntled employee.' When a suspect with ties to American ultra-nationalists was arrested, attention shifted to the "militia" phenomenon. Although resurgent white supremacy had been seething for years, and despite the warnings of watchdog groups, the mainstream .media acted as if the militias had come out of nowhere

The lesson here is that, while a white American Christian acts alone Muslims always work together. In such a discourse, Muslims are guilty merely by association with the vast menagerie of imagery that government and corporate outlets use to sell .products and ideas to Americans

The cruel ironies of American domestic problems began to pile up for Muslims: once it was announced that a man with possible ties to the militias was arrested for the Oklahoma City bombing and emphasis shifted away from "Islamic terror", some branches of the corporate news media insisted on clinging to the hope that there might still be an "Islamic connection," since "our boys" don't do such things; once a white Christian American "good old boy" stood accused of the crime, programmes entitled "Terror in the Heartland" were replaced by those with titles like "Tragedy in Oklahoma;" once

---

This was reported by Reuters ۲۰ April ۱۹۹۵; for a fuller account of the media circus, -۱ see the July/August ۱۹۹۵ issue of Extra!, the magazine of Fairness and Accuracy in .Reporting

it was clear that there were no “Islamic extremists” to blame, the tone of public discourse softened remarkably, with less talk of “retaliation” and more about “forgiveness “ Despite the obvious haste with which American officialdom was set to blame Muslims, there were no public apologies to Muslims once it was clear that they could not be blamed.

The Utility of “Muslim Terror” in Israeli–American Relations

In the ١٩٧٠s, Arab American academics like Edmund Ghareeb, Jack Shaheen, and Michael Suleiman made strong connections between stereotypes of Arabs in corporate culture and the issue of Palestine.(١)They concluded that in order for the dispossession of Palestinians to be supported by ordinary Americans, Arabs had to be written off as either backward barbarians (who don't understand that colonization is in their best interests) or violent terrorists (who deserve to be eliminated).

This was a time when no one used the term “Muslim fundamentalist.” Even the Islamic revolution in Iran was seen as some kind of wild and crazy Persian phenomenon.

At the same time, with the gradual acquiescence of Arab regimes to either American or Israeli demands throughout the ١٩٨٠s and ١٩٩٠s, there was a shift from “Arab terror” to “Muslim terror.” The infrastructure of imagery, already in place from decades of anti-Arab propaganda, simply had to be transferred to Muslims, the new “enemies of peace.”

In fact, many of the same political problems still persist, but the “terrorists” are now conceptualized as Muslims, since Arab regimes were now obedient allies. Although the Persian Gulf Oil War was a successful test

---

١ - For a representative sample of this work, see the following: Edmund Ghareeb, ed. Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media (Washington, DC: The American-Arab Affairs Council, ١٩٨٣); Jack Shaheen, The TV Arab (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, ١٩٨٤); Michael W. Suleiman, The

.(Arabs in the Mind of America (Brattleboro, Vermont: Amana Books, ١٩٨٨

case for enframing the Muslim world into “good” and “bad” parties, Zionist colonization .of Palestine still remains one of the core issues contributing to conflict in West Asia

American scholar Edward S. Herman believes that anti-Muslim racism in US corporate culture is closely related to the issue of Palestine. He sees an “enormous pro-Israel (and anti-Arab) bias of the mainstream media and intelligentsia,” and gives four :sources of this bias

.Israel's strategic value to the US .١

.The influence of the pro-Israel lobby, AIPAC .٢

.Western feelings of guilt toward Jews .٣

.Anti-Arab racism .۴

:Herman clarifies what he means by anti-Arab racism

This racism is mainly an effect and reflection of interest and policy rather than a casual factor. . . Arabs who cooperate with the West. . . are not subject to racist .epithets and stereotypes

This suggests that if other Arabs were more tractable and responsive to Western demands they would cease to be negatively stereotyped. Scapegoating is a function (of power and interest. (١

While his remarks on anti-Arab racism illustrate my point about the utility of imagery, I want to take another one of Herman's observations-the pervasiveness of the Israeli lobby in framing American policy-and look at the utility of Muslim terror in that .context

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) held a conference on the “Middle East Peace Process” in Washington DC on ٧ May ١٩٩۵, which was aired live on CSPAN. The guests of honour included US president Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime .Minister Yitzhak Rabin

In

p: ۳۴

۱- Herman's statements are taken from a piece he wrote in the November ۱۹۹۴ issue of Z Magazine.

his speech, Rabin warned that “extremist radical Islamic fundamentalists” are the “enemies of peace” and that “Khomeinism without Khomeini is the greatest danger to ”.stability, tranquillity and peace in the Middle East and the world

The “scourge of Khomeinism” has replaced the “scourge of communism,” and even as the Israelis “consolidate peace with Jordan,” the forces of “terror” are seeking to ”.“destroy peace between peoples of our area

He called for the “free world,” which successfully mobilized itself against communism, to mobilized itself against “Khomeinism.” Rabin concluded by stressing that “only a strong Israel can guarantee stability in the Mideast” and that, therefore, US foreign aid “must remain a key pillar of the peace process.” But the aid Rabin demands is ”.about more than “peace” and “stability

Israel cannot survive without continuous transfusions of American dollars, both from US government aid ($۴-۵ billion in American tax dollars annually), and private contributions, making Israel one of the few states in the world whose economic viability relies almost entirely on foreign donations and charity. (Despite this, it has never been economically viable, with even the World Bank considering Israel to be a (.weak financial risk

This is meaningful because recently the US Congress has been threatening to cut foreign aid. While the Cold War provided the impetus for supporting aid for Israel as the "first line of defense" against the “communist threat,” it seems that the “Islamic threat” is now being utilized for the same purpose by Israeli politicians and their proxies

.in the US Congress

After Rabin concluded his speech, AIPAC president Steve Grossman introduced US president Bill Clinton by emphasizing that Clinton has raised the “strategic partnership between the US and Israel to new levels.” Clinton began his speech by emphasizing ”.that the US role in the “peace process” was to “minimize the risks taken for peace

He then noted that Russia's cooperation with Iran was a “prime concern” of the US because Iran is “bent on building nuclear weapons.” Clinton ignored another “prime concern” of people living in the region, the long standing Israeli nuclear weapons programme and its cooperation with South Africa in detonating a several nuclear weapons, or its kidnapping and imprisonment of Mordecai Vanunu, an Israeli technician who revealed the existence of the long-denied Israeli nuclear weapons .programme to the outside world

Clintons rationale for preventing Iranian-Russian cooperation was that since Iran has “ample oil reserves” it cannot possibly need nuclear technology for peaceful energy purposes. He warned that while Iran haunts the Mideast,” the US will seek to “contain Iran as the principle sponsor of terrorism in the world,” reminding his audience that ”.Iran undermines the West and its values

He also thanked the Israelis for “drawing our attention to Iran's history of supporting terrorism.” But the utility of this imagery became clearer when Clinton next asked for AIPAC to help out with the floundering American embargo against Iran. American attempts at convincing the Europeans and Japanese to sever their economic ties with Iran have

been met with little international support, and he seemed to think the Israelis would .have some sway over European politicians

Clinton stated that US support for Israel was “absolute” and that all forms of current assistance will be continued.-He chastised the US Congress as a bunch of “budget cutting back door isolationists” for daring to suggest that the US discontinue its bloated but politically selective foreign aid programs, emphasizing that the US “did not win the Cold War to blow the peace” on budgetary issues. But the kind of peace that Clinton and his cohorts support is clear from the ensuing promises he made to the .AIPAC congregation

Clinton revealed that the once closed American space launcher vehicle market would now be open to the Israeli arms industry, along with other previously unavailable high-tech US weaponry. He also noted that the US would escalate its pre-positioning of weaponry in Israel, and that it would buy $۳ billion worth of Israeli made military products. Since the US already has the largest military-industrial complex in the world, .buying weapons from Israel is another thinly disguised form of economic aid

As with other aid, US taxpayers are slated to foot the bill in the name of “national security.” Clinton explained the need for all of this wheeling and dealing about war and weapons of mass destruction as necessary because “Israel is on the front line of the battle for freedom and peace.” Again seeming to assume that they held some sway over public

opinion, this time domestically, Clinton suggested that AIPAC help to “lobby” the .American people about budgetary matters

Israel needs more than military aid. Clinton also assured his audience that the US will continue to support-loan guarantees for the “settlement of ۶۰۰,۰۰۰ immigrants from ”.the former Soviet Union

This is perhaps the most intractable problem in the Middle East conflict, and one of the main causes of tension, since many Russian emigres are given inducements (and military training) to settle in West Bank areas, in and around Palestinian towns. But in the official conceptualization of this issue, when people who live there resist in any way, they do so because they are inherently “terrorists,” not because of any .machinations of state power. This contradiction is worth a closer look

Rabin used the word “terrorist,” and its by product “terror,” more than “peace” in his speeches like the one at the AIPAC conference. Bernard Nietschmann attempts to (provide clarification of the utility of language used to describe conflict and war. (۱)

He concludes that most wars and conflicts in the world today are of the state-versus-nation variety, and in most cases the state is able to frame the nation they are trying to subdue as “terrorists” or “extremists.” Those states, in many cases clients of larger states like the US, are generally supported by the major Western corporate news .media

Nietschmann believes that a term like “terrorist” is in most cases a non-word in the struggle for normative issues: the aggressors have

---

۱- Bernard Nietschmann, "The Third World War," Cultural Survival Quarterly ۱۱, no. ۳ .((۱۹۸۷)

always provided the definitions of words used to explain their actions. (۱) As we have .seen above, words provide the climate for actions

Especially useful is the assertion that "terrorist" is basically a non- word, because it is always used from a position of power to describe those who struggle against the status quo, or the emerging neo-colonial world order. (One could add to this the term "fundamentalist," which came into vogue after the Islamic Revolution in Iran; .(".similarly, the French use "integriste

State terminology defines struggles and these terminologies are used to undermine nations that want to have their own vision. More often than not, the nations under state domination are indigenous peoples- Native Americans, Palestinians, South .Africans, Australian Aboriginals- who were displaced by European invaders

Nietschmann reminds his fellow Western political scientists that state systems set up boundaries and that all peoples within those boundaries become subjects. The present historical moment does tell us that states result in hierarchy and violence, .that lines on a map make the world, that history has become the history of lines

States define land masses, and most defy logic. The state system serves transnational corporations, which need to be able to deal with a head man. In addition .to facilitating transfer of goods, states also allow use of force within their borders

Usually, the violence is explained as a police action against terrorists, who are portrayed as acting out of some kind of irrational, religious fanaticism. Occasionally, states will even cross borders into

---

۱ - The relationship between language and politics, and especially the struggle over normative issues, is nicely detailed by Franke Wilmer, The Indigenous Voice in World .(Politics: From Time Immemorial (London: Sage Publications, ۱۹۹۳

another state to attack “terrorists” without actually declaring war on that state, as in repeated Israeli invasions of southern Lebanon, or the recent Turkish incursions into northern Iraq.

There are parallels to this discussion in US history. When Mexicans resisted US expansion in the ١٩th century, they were called “bandits.” Texans had a policy to shoot on sight any bandits, and sometimes marched as far as Mexico City to root out banditry.

However, the “war against banditry” was accompanied by a systematic process of enclosure and depopulation, followed by mass ranch ownership. Within ٢ years, over a million acres were conquered, while the “bandits” were relegated to the realm of American popular culture.

Similar stories could be told about racism toward Native Americans. Returning to Berkhofer's discussion of whites stereotyping Native Americans, he notes that warlike images of Indians prevailed when Indians were a threat to US interests, and that the nostalgic images prevailed when they were seen as a vanishing race.

When the US was involved with military action against Haiti around the turn of the century, American newspapers featured stories about stereotypical Haitians, drawing upon a previously constructed repertoire of images and tales of cannibalism and barbarous voodoo rituals.

Nietschmann's distinction between “state” and “nation” is useful, but it suffers from some glaring omissions, particularly in his list of nation/state conflicts. Israeli incursions into Lebanon since the early ١٩٧٠s are not mentioned, nor is Indian domination over Kashmir.

While the Timorese struggle against the Indonesian state is stressed,

the struggle of the Achenese is ignored. These Muslim peoples have been struggling against oppression and domination since the ۱۹th century, first against Dutch .imperialism and later against its Indonesian surrogate state

Can the Shi'ites of Iraq and Bahrain (where they are oppressed majorities) and in Saudi Arabia (where they are an oppressed minority) be classified as "nations"? Or are religious distinctions not acceptable? There are other shortcomings in this short work .on a long topic, but the overall point is instructive

Conventional American public discourse utilizes images of Islamic resistant movements as intolerant and predisposed toward violence. While many contemporary movements do have a strong anti-Western sentiment, it is often .qualified and in any case is a fairly recent phenomenon

If Arabs and Muslims are extremists in anything, I believe that it is in the patience and tolerance they have shown toward persistent Western interventions until very recently. Islamic movements have much more important characteristics than .intolerance and violence

A central concept is social justice. In the West, where it is fashionable to be anti-social under the pretense that socialism is obsolete, it is easy to overlook calls for social justice and fixate instead on violent struggle. But seeing social movements only in terms of violence, real or imagined, is seeing them only in terms that are important to .a narrow set of strategic interests

I became deeply interested in this line of research around the time of the Persian Gulf Oil War in ۱۹۹۰-۹۱. I was amazed at

how readily the government and the corporate news media were able to rally public support for that senseless and destructive war.

I was sickened by the grotesqueness of the war and the way academic experts and journalists self-righteously mimicked each other's stereotypes and biases in their inhuman depictions of “bad” Arabs and Muslims, while slavishly parroting the official public relations-fueled imagery of the “good” ones.

I found it absolutely incredible that the persona of Saddam Hussein could be reworked from loyal proxy, during his murderous war against Iran, to Hitlerian demon after he became too big for his American britches.

I thought to myself, Americans must be brain dead if they buy this. Many did. Not content with that as the sole explanation, I set out to see how imagery could be reworked to expedite a shifting political economy.

This article is largely about what I found. One of the points I have tried to make is that Western civilization maintains a shifting array of images about Islam and Muslims. These images can be called upon as needed to explain, justify or simplify complex political, social and economic problems, whether they be international or domestic.

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ٩

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ٢٠٠٧, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

:Our Goals are

(propagating the culture and teachings of Thaqalayn (Quran and Ahlulbayt p.b.u.t-

encouraging the populace particularly the youth in investigating the religious issues-

replacing useful contents with useless ones in the cellphones, tablets and computers-

providing services for seminary and university researchers-

spreading culture study in the publich-

paving the way for the publications and authors to digitize their works-

:Policies

acting according to the legal licenses-

relationship with similar centers-

avoiding parallel working-

merely presenting scientific contents-

mentioning the sources-

.It’s obvious that all the responsibilities are due to the author

:Other activities of the institute

Publication of books, booklets and other editions-

Holding book reading competitions-

Producing virtual, three dimensional exhibitions, panoramas of religious and tourism- places

.Producing animations, computer games and etc-

Launching the website with this address: www.ghaemiyeh.com-

Fabricatingdramatic and speech works-

Launching the system of answering religious, ethical and doctrinal questions-

Designing systems of accounting, media and mobile, automatic and handy systems,- web kiosks

Holding virtual educational courses for the public-

Holding virtual teacher-training courses-

Producing thousands of research software in three languages (Persian, Arabic and- English) which can be performed in computers, tablets and cellphones and available and downloadable with eight international formats: JAVA, ANDROID, EPUB, CHM, PDF, HTML, CHM, GHB on the website

Also producing four markets named “Ghaemiyeh Book Market” with Android, IOS,- WINDOWS PHONE and WINDOWS editions

:Appreciation

We would appreciate the centers, institutes, publications, authors and all honorable .friends who contributed their help and data to us to reach the holy goal we follow

:Address of the central office
Isfahan, Abdorazaq St, Haj Mohammad JafarAbadei Alley, Shahid Mohammad HasanTavakkoly Alley, Number plate ۱۲۹, first floor
Website: www.ghbook.ir
Email: Info@ghbook.ir
Central office Tel: ۰۳۱۳۴۴۹۰۱۲۵
۰۲۱ ـ Tehran Tel: ۸۸۳۱۸۷۲۲
Commerce and sale: ۰۹۱۳۲۰۰۰۱۰۹
Users' affairs: ۰۹۱۳۲۰۰۰۱۰۹

Introduction of the Center – Ghaemiyeh Digital Library